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THEOLOGY FROM THE FAR END AND THE NEAR

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Professor James tells us that pragmatism has suddenly precipitated itself out of the air. Of absolutism the opposite is true: while not losing its definite centres of influence, it has gradually diffused itself into the air. Everywhere the tendency has been to exalt the universal and to minimize the individual; to belittle the human and to ascribe all to the divine; to emphasize the far end and to ignore the near. This absolutist atmosphere and tendency is the theme of the present article.

The absolutist types of thought are largely, if not essentially, deductive and a priori: they are drawn from a conception of the universe, and reject what does not fit that conception. Such systems have an inherent attractiveness, for they are generally large and orderly and appeal to the intellectual imagination. They carry with them an air of assurance, especially when presented in the form of the dilemma. In the last resort we seem to be shut up to one of two conclusions, one apparently impossible, the other equally inevitable. But a deeper reason for the continued influence of a priori reasonings is found in the truth they contain. The dynamic unity of the mental life precedes its elements and the analysis of them. Experience and reflection upon it imply something anterior to experience. A human mind has certain native instincts, inherent ways of dealing with experience, apart from which experience as we know it would not be possible. Thus we inevitably act upon the principle of contradiction; we behave as if we believed it long before we are able to grasp the idea. This seems to be the simplest and most fundamental aspect of the great idea of unity—an idea corresponding with an ultimate fact that works unconsciously in our life long before we grasp it as an explicit idea. Deductive arguments derive their interest and force from their bold use of such constituents of thought and the frank appeal they make to them.

These presuppositions, however, are not to take the place of a careful examination of facts, but are to guide us in dealing with experience. The history of thought makes it clear that when men try to deduce truth from necessary principles they fall into error. Fruitful results are obtained only when we keep close to observation and experience, which we interpret by the light of reason. The more religious the theologian is, the greater his need of this warning. For religion is largely rooted in the fact that men can and do pass through and beyond the details of life and reach some conviction regarding the final purpose and significance of all. A chief function of theology is to see whether such an attitude can be formally stated and justified. A theology is valuable in proportion as it unites the religious disposition of the heart and will with the most uncompromising loyalty to fact. It is not difficult to work out harmonious and beautiful schemes of the universe, but the insistent question arises, Upon what facts do they rest? Theology must be very cautious in reasoning from the infinite, and give greater attention to the humbler but more serviceable task of thinking toward it. Though it is late in the day to say that the argument, "It must be so, therefore it is so," is discredited, absolutism gives many occasions for saying it. Deductions from general ideas of universal law, infinite intelligence, or perfect goodness, must be used very sparingly. Reasonings based upon definitions, such as the contention that since the term "universe" has a certain meaning the reality must accord with it, can be given little weight in a modern theology. An understanding of the world can be had only from an investigation of it. The conceptions of the nature of ultimate reality which we from time to time formulate are valuable, and doubtless give us some knowledge of the truth, but they are not so complete and accurate as to warrant us in setting aside as unreal any of the contradictory phases of life because they do not fit our ideas of the whole. To do so is to fall into the vice to which system-making is always prone, the tendency to tyrannize over the contents of the common consciousness.

These general remarks may close with a consideration of the most important presupposition of absolutism. A chief ground and fundamental justification of its method—sometimes avowed,

often used only implicitly—is an application of the maxim of parsimony which runs thus: All investigation proceeds upon the assumption that causes and explanations are not to be unnecessarily multiplied. Reason, then, naturally seeks simplicity and unity; and absolute reality must be in accord with this method, or all our study and reasoning are useless.

This contention cannot be allowed, nor is such use of the maxim of parsimony valid. In our speculative thinking we seek not the simplest and fewest principles, but the most correct. Our concern is not with the most convenient way to handle things, but with their final nature and meaning. We do not know beforehand whether the universe is fundamentally simple or complex, and to assume that it is either is to beg the question in dispute and to close the investigation in the act of opening it. If reality be not ultimately simple, it is an error to simplify it theoretically. The initial step of absolutistic logical method is thus seen to be the work of a presupposition that seeks to dictate the character of the universe rather than to discover it, and exploits nature in the interests of a theory instead of studying her ways.

The type of thought we are considering is generally set forth as peculiarly modern. In its religious form it claims to be the only theology that fits our civilization. In estimating the truth of this claim we will be empirical and begin at the near end. What is the most characteristic thing about the development of modern civilization? Probably no one thing would be so generally named as the increasing importance and worth of the individual. To make his liberty sure; to safeguard his civil, political, and religious rights; to afford him the largest possible room for personal life and development, is a chief aim of the movements of modern life. Along with this has gone—partly as effect, partly as cause—a deepening sense of the dignity and worth of men. Do we not regard a civilization as modern or otherwise in proportion as it gives or fails to give emphasis to the worth, the dignity, the rights, and the powers of individuals? This exaltation of the individual has reached its highest expression in our English-speaking race. From the earliest glimpses we have of that race to the present day it has been distinguished by an assertion of the worth and importance of the private citizen and a sturdy use of his rights and liberties.

Much speculative monism serenely ignores or directly contradicts this feature of modern life. If modern civilization has any suggestion to offer philosophy, surely it is this sense of the value and significance of the individual. If the tendencies and principles of historical development are to mean anything for us in our attempts to frame some scheme touching the final nature of reality and the ultimate significance of life, surely the first thing they mean is that the importance of the individual, his profound significance, and his supreme worth are to be made essential elements of such a scheme. The numberless variety of men, the endless diversity of personal life, the rights and powers of individuals, are to be taken, not as hindrances to be overcome nor as puzzles to be eliminated, but as a master-key to aid in the solution of the problem. Here is a great defect in the prevalent absolutism. Whereas a modern philosophy ought to be democratic, it is monarchical. Far from being modern, it is, in its essential idea—the absolute supremacy of One—characteristically ancient and mediaeval. Its fundamental conception is better fitted to Oriental habits of mind than to our modern, Western, American civilization.

Speculative thought is slow to grasp and use the suggestions of modern civilization. There is still to appear a thinker of the first rank who will take in earnest the democratic, individualistic impulses of the modern world, and use them in a final philosophy. Leibnitz did something of this sort, so far as his realm of monads differs fundamentally from the attempts to reduce all things to the manifestations of a single reality. Lotze also has some fruitful ideas in the same vein, but nothing very important. Professor Howison's book, *The Limits of Evolution*, is made seriously defective by the author's rejection of the idea of the evolution of the soul, and his advocacy of a metaphysical theory of its eternal pre-existence. Pragmatism will probably in time lead to some positive results, but as yet it has done little for constructive thought. Unity remains the dominant idea in our thinking. And it is assumed that unity must mean the absolute rule of one being or principle. Modern life suggests a very different conception. The world is to be thought of, not as an absolute monarchy or empire, but as a commonwealth of souls, wherein all

power and right are not derived from a supreme ruler, but are lodged in the individuals comprising the community. The supreme ruler derives his right to rule, not so much from the fact that in him all souls originated, as from his purpose to regard the rights, the powers, and the welfare of all the members, to restrain and punish those who refuse to recognize the rights of others and oppose themselves to the general welfare; and from his wisdom and power, by virtue of which he is able to enforce the laws of righteousness. If our theology is to be really modern, must it not follow some such suggestion as this rather than continue to build upon monarchical conceptions? Has philosophy nothing to learn from democracy and republicanism? To the advocates of absolutism who assert that any other than their way of thinking is a survival of outgrown "dualism" it is fitting to reply that their characteristic ideas are survivals of old-world influences, conceptions carried over from times when men were unable to conceive of order and stability except under the rule of an absolute monarch before whom individuals were nothing. The real choice for us lies not between a dualism of God and devil, on the one hand, and absolutism, on the other: it is between the conception of God as an absolute ruler of individuals, devoid of any real initiative of their own, and the thought of the universe as a commonwealth or family of souls, each of whom has his rights and powers which God himself cannot ignore or override. Herein is the very heart of the problem for the modern mind.

Recently it has become evident that many absolutists see the defect of their thought touching personality, for they endeavor to amend it. The intention is clear, but its success is not. Assurances that unqualified monism is not inconsistent with personality or careless of its interests are not sufficient. Indeed their very explicitness reveals a fundamental weakness. The principle of personality must be an integral part of the whole. Mere protests and amendments do not do it justice.

Coming to a more specific theological realm, it is important to notice that the progress of theology in America, especially in New England, has been vitally connected with an increasing sense of the value of man, personality, and freedom. Among the oddities of theological nomenclature is the inappropriate though common

use of the phrase "The New England Theology." It is generally applied to a system of belief which, thought out by Calvin in Geneva, was imported into New England, and was in no way peculiar to it. The title would much more fittingly be applied to the liberal thought which, beginning in a reaction and protest against the Calvinistic doctrines of God's unlimited sovereignty and man's moral inability, found its first great exponent in Channing. This theology is a native growth; and is the natural expression in religion of the New Englander's faith in democracy and assertion of liberty. Herein is one explanation of the way in which its principles have permeated and influenced the religious life of New England. This liberal theology has, in its great representatives from Channing to Everett, taught the moral freedom and ability of men, the dignity and worth of the individual. This factor has rightly been as prominent as its doctrine of God; and Hedge thought that it should have been called "humanitarian Christianity." Likewise with a similar theology in England: Martineau, who thankfully acknowledged his indebtedness to the inspiration of Channing, made the freedom and value of the individual a central conception of his theology, and in his final exposition of his thought gave the world his *Types of Ethical Theory* in advance of the *Study of Religion*. Of late, however, there has come into liberalism a strong current of determinism and absolutism, the force of which is derived mainly from the tendencies of scientific speculation. It directly contradicts some of the most characteristic conceptions for which liberalism has stood, and its assertions of the absoluteness of God and the inability of the individual are not logically congruous with the principles of liberalism nor lineally descended from them.

Modern life, and the distinctively modern interpretation of life, have something further to tell us about the significance of the individual. By a characteristically modern interpretation of life is meant one not explicitly given by older schools, and different in essential respects from those of past ages. The really modern man regards life as an opportunity for personal achievement, a chance for him to do something with himself and his environment. Life is taken, not as a gift to be passively received nor as a problem to be solved by reflection, but as something to be acquired

by working and waiting. This emphasis upon the active, practical aspect of life constitutes an attitude different from that of the Middle Ages. With the dawn of the modern era, not independent thinking only, but active energy began to have a larger place in men's lives. Ideals of understanding the world were not merely supplemented by ideals of mastery over it: they became subordinate to them. Instead of speculating about the shape and size of the earth, men explored it to see what it might be and how to use it. This change received expression in philosophy in Kant's subordination of the pure or theoretical reason to the practical or active reason—an expression the full significance of which was not seen by Kant himself. Fichte took it up and enunciated it in some of the most inspiring teaching the world knows. Carlyle (chiefly in his earlier writings) and Emerson gave it more complete expression. These men and their utterances roused others to gird themselves, to stand up and deal with life in the power and dignity of manhood. Under such inspiration life is taken as a challenge, and men are led to be masters and creators as well as thinkers. "Trust thyself; trust the world; get something good done"—such is the teaching.

This individualism of will is one of the causes of the supremacy of the English-speaking race. It is a Frenchman who has recently called attention to it.¹ Anglo-Saxon superiority is due mainly to the individual energy and self-reliance of the Englishman. He does not wish society to care for him; he asks only for a fair chance. He wishes to earn his living and to make his own way. He is not afraid to face the world and to take risks. So he gets on. Spain and France each started with a better chance in America than did England. But the Frenchman, depending too much upon a central government, and the Spaniard, dreaming of gold and a fountain of youth, failed. The Englishman, self-reliant and enterprising, saw in America not a paradise of ease, but an opportunity for liberty and work. He set to work. His individual enterprise and energy made America.

Protestantism is largely rooted in this individualism of will, and we are slowly finding it out. Whereas with the Roman

¹Edmond Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon Superiority*. Translated by L. B. Lavigne, 1898.

Catholic salvation is a gift to be received from the Church in return for obedience and submission, Protestantism more and more sees in salvation a fuller, higher life, to be attained by the coöperation of a man himself with God. The Church is not to provide a sure entrance into heaven after death, but to help men to a nobler character and a richer life here and now.

A specific instance of the practical result of this modern attitude may be given. After the steamship "Deutschland" made her first trip across the Atlantic, a technical journal published the tabulated statements of the working of her engines and boilers. From the fact that the engines developed, for each pound and a half of coal burned, one horse-power exerted for one hour, a calculation was made as to the increase of the world's available energy. It was shown that to develop power equal to that produced by the annual yield of coal in the United States, if used with similar results, twenty million workers would have to labor one hundred and eight years. This increase of available power has been brought about by the practical wisdom and enterprise of individual men. Yet in the name of modern thought it is gravely argued that to suppose that our human wills have any power of initiative is childish conceit! Fortunately discoverers, inventors, and leaders of enterprise do not think so. This tremendous energy lay useless, even unknown, until men who supposed they did count for something and could initiate something grappled with the apparently unpromising elements of the earth. Our wills, we are frequently told, are only tiny, meagre, and feeble manifestations of the one universal will, vain and helpless without God, and can originate nothing. That wholly apart from God we could do nothing, and would be nothing, is not here questioned. But if facts of history give any indication of the truth, many of them indicate that in important ways God is helpless apart from men. By means of irrigation men cause deserts to blossom as the rose. In modern market-gardening the farmer makes any climate and soil he desires, and gets five crops a year from one piece of ground. Mr. Burbank has in a few years outdistanced the work of thousands of years of nature—the universal life which some assure us is the absolute master of men. Electricity as a natural force is perhaps the oldest of all forms of power, but only recently has it by the

skill and toil of men been made subservient to our welfare. In this progressive subjection of nature to human welfare an eminent American economist finds a new economic basis of civilization, and tells us that we have passed out of the "pain or deficit economy," in which men had to fight a deficit, and have entered upon a "pleasure or surplus economy," in which our problem is how to distribute equitably a surplus of resources.² In substantial harmony with this is the view of a great English naturalist who sees in man "nature's insurgent son," whose appearance made a new departure in cosmic evolution, whose will has become a new ruler that has profoundly modified not only his own history but that of the whole living world and even the face of the planet³ on which he lives. Are these characteristics of human life in general and modern life in particular to count for nothing in our thought? Is it reasonable to suppose that they have no ontological significance? Should we ignore the conceptions of our own civilization, and allow other ideas to direct our thinking? And if we continue to follow such a course, would it not be well to see the true character of our principles, and not confuse ourselves by calling them modern and civilized?

But, it is confidently asserted by theological absolutism, our whole conception of an orderly, systematic world makes it impossible for us to believe in individual freedom and initiative; for in a universe "there cannot be any room for independent and creative wills actually thwarting the Good Will."⁴ If there were such, there would no longer be a universe, but only a "multiverse," and this choice between chaos and cosmos is held to be ultimate and decisive. But is our knowledge of the universe so full and exact as to warrant such confident assertions as to the possible and the impossible? No reason based upon observation and experience is given for the statement just quoted. It is offered as a self-evident truth, belief in which is compelled by the law of contradiction. Two conceptions are compared, and, being found incompatible, one is taken and the other left. For modern thought, however, the question is, What kind of a world is given in expe-

²Simon N. Patten, *The New Basis of Civilization*, 1907.

³E. Ray Lankester, *The Kingdom of Man*, 1907.

⁴Charles F. Dole, *The Theology of Civilization*, 1899, p. 61.

rience? The only satisfactory manner of getting light upon the great problem of the relation between human wills and the divine will is by observation of experience and reasoning from it. We must see what there is in life that throws light upon the relation of the one and the many. The neglect of absolutism to approach the problem in this way is another instance of the dominance of deductive method in its thought. Instead of careful observation and reasoning therefrom we are often given statements that have made a strong impression upon the minds of those making them. Now on every hand actual affairs furnish instances that help to a solution of the problem. A modern business establishment is planned and created mainly by the wisdom and ability of one man, without whom it would never have come into existence. Yet he alone could not have accomplished the result. He furnishes the main outlines of the business, but it is carried into execution by a small army of subordinates. To each of these is given a certain amount of discretion and power of action. Within limits each decides what is to be done, and has the decision carried out. A mistake, carelessness, or dishonesty, on the part of an assistant, injures the business, while continual care and attention, and a wise, timely move, help it. The freedom and independence of the subordinates are real though limited. The head of the house does not attempt to do everything himself, nor does he even closely direct his assistants. A university, a federal union of states or provinces, are other examples of the same thing. More interesting and instructive, because more ancient and familiar, is the family. The parents guide in a general way the family life. The children as they grow are given larger individual liberty, more and more they plan their own lives, until at last the relation between children and parents ceases to be that of governors and governed and becomes a human companionship of affection and interest. A family shows how an indwelling, overruling providence of wisdom and goodness is compatible with great liberty, independence, and initiative on the part of individuals.

These instances help us to understand both the actual and the ideal relation between the One and the Many. They show how baseless is the theory that, if there is one God, there cannot be

creative wills, capable of working with or against the supreme will. If facts of observation are to count for anything, if we are to get light upon the problem of the universe from the conduct of affairs upon earth, there can easily be independent wills capable of originating action in or out of harmony with the purposes of the supreme will.

Into the many considerations that lead us to believe that there are wills with a real though limited independence this article cannot enter. One point only will be mentioned. If men are wholly without power of initiative, if they are mere helpless, passive manifestations of one absolute will, then all the evil and sin of the world is the act of God. A Japanese woman sold her step-daughter to a man for ten yen (five dollars). If there is no human independence and initiative, then God sold the girl—and God bought her. Common sense and moral reverence forbid the thought. No vigor and rigor of logic can make such a conclusion other than odious and blasphemous. Nor can the matter be mended by using the idea of development and saying that this outrage is only a step in a process which is, on the whole, good. For either there is something of supreme worth which gives a standard of value or there is not. If there is not, the process has no moral significance. If there is, then for us it must consist in the dignity of human souls. Any degradation of souls then becomes an evil as long as it lasts. Such evil is not made better by being viewed as a stage in a development. For again, what is the final purpose and meaning of the process? It consists in the promotion of the dignity and nobleness of souls. But here is an insult put upon a soul. While it continues it is evil—evil which cannot rationally be made anything else, and ought not morally to be called anything else. A course of development that needs such wrong, or inevitably produces it, cannot be wholly divine. It is impossible to regard as the unmodified work of a righteous God a process that repeatedly destroys the highest moral values known to us. This conclusion cannot be set aside by an attempt to force a hasty and complete answer to the question, Then what is it that is not divine? The point that calls for emphasis here is that, if God is to be to us a moral being, worthy of reverence and worship, we must believe that, whatever may be the ultimate

explanation of the Japanese woman's act, it is not to be attributed to God. We are sure that truth is not to be found by flat contradictions of plain moral sense and ordinary spiritual insight. Some distinctions we must hold, even though they do not readily fit into our preconceived schemes of the universe.

If now, passing over many intermediate steps of thought, we conclude that men can and do commit wickedness, are we consequently compelled to surrender faith in divine providence? Or what is the relation between the misdeeds of men and the providence of God? It is vain to seek light here simply by working with intellectual conceptions. We must bring our ideas into contact with the realities of observation, and from the interworking of the two we may gain some truth. Instances already given show how an indwelling, overruling purpose may exist along with the freedom, the mistakes, even the wickedness of men. The manager of a department of a great business may blunder, or sell his employer's secrets to a competitor, or steal his employer's money. An injury, trivial or serious, results. The head of the establishment must be ready to repair such injuries. Probably he has at the start so limited the power of his subordinates that none of them can fatally injure the business. Evidently, then, considerable liberty may be given to individuals, and there may be much misuse of it, along with the carrying out of a supreme purpose. It is, then, sheer assumption to say that for theology to recognize the power of initiative in men is to destroy our conception of a universe and leave us with a chaos.

This, however, only establishes the possibility of a universal providence; experience alone can tell us whether there is such a providence. What then do we experience in connection with our mistakes and wrong-doing? We find offered to us opportunities of amendment and recuperation. A man sins carelessly or wilfully. He generally finds at hand some remedy for his degradation. He makes a mistake, and discovers that he can learn the lesson of it and avoid it in the future. Frequently he can do much to repair the damage wrought by his error or misdeed. We can destroy, but we can also build. We hurt and degrade ourselves by evil, but we can receive a cure. No sin seems to be final: recovery is always possible, newness of life is always to be had,

and unexpected currents of vitality continually appear: there are no signs of exhaustion. These helps and remedies, this restoration of our souls, is offered to us. We do not make them: we only receive and apply them. Our life and experience, small as they are, are in close vital connection with the whole of existence, and its inexhaustible life environs and supports us. This is the manifestation in intimate, personal experience of the moral providence of God. It has been working in the past, and it works now. Revealed close at hand for our good, it is yet so vast and deep that we cannot comprehend it. We do apprehend it and are aided by it, because it first apprehends us. This revelation of greatness as well as nearness leads the soul to make the leap of faith and to believe that there is in God a remedy for every possible mistake and misdeed of men. The field of his wisdom and goodness is larger than that of human activity, and includes all its possibilities. We may help or hinder, but we cannot destroy, the purposes of God. A victorious army is none the less triumphant because there have been shirkers and cowards in its ranks; and they are none the less blameworthy and contemptible because the army has triumphed. A man chooses whether he will have his place with the true men who fight well or among the skulkers who only hinder the victory.

When, then, the absolutist asks incredulously if a man can by the exercise of his little will interfere with the working of divine providence, the reply must be, Surely he can. The best conception we can form of such providence is that it is an attempt to gain the voluntary coöperation of individuals in the welfare of a great family. The free assent of men to a divine purpose, their consent to its laws, their willing dedication of themselves to a divine life, are the very heart of the matter. But if men can consent to such a purpose and work with it, they can also refrain from doing so either by mere neglect or deliberate refusal. Probably the vast mass of wrong-doing is at bottom heedlessness rather than intentional choice of evil. Christian theology has greatly exaggerated the element of deliberate wilfulness in sin. Men seldom intentionally choose evil as their good; they are simply careless of their diviner possibilities. But this heedlessness is sinful, and hinders the realization of God's purpose in human life. For the

best cannot be forced upon us even by God; it comes to us only when we voluntarily appropriate it. Paradoxical as it may be, it is true that it is possible for a man to have an excess of faith in God. This is undeniable on the prosaic level of common affairs, for there, if a man merely commits himself to providence and does not proceed to earn a living, providence lets him starve. It is equally true in the highest concerns of our nature. There God is hindered until and unless we work with him.

The absolutist types of thought have done a great work for theology. By going directly to the centre, dealing with the whole of existence at once, and explaining everything finite by relating it to the infinite, they have reached truth of the highest value, that will surely stand. The conception of a world-unity is so firmly established by many concurrent lines of observation and reasoning that assaults upon it are vain. Constructive thought not only may use it but must incorporate it as an essential part of its schemes. But this alone is not enough. The manifold parts and aspects of the world must be studied, and proper attention given to the interests and objects of actual life. The ultimate unity is doubtless more than these, but it certainly is not without them. It is only a dialectic prejudice that leads the absolutist system-makers to insist that we must choose between all-monism and all-pluralism. They are wholly right when they contend that the universe is a rational system, but wrong in concluding that only one kind of system is possible. The systems well known by us in experience are not so closely fitted and minutely dovetailed that variation, contingency, and free play of the parts are impossible. The facts are just the opposite; and there is a multitude of reasons for thinking that it is the same with the universal order. Philosophical theology must regard these things, and use a case method of investigation as well as the dialectical. The revelations of the telescope do not annul those of the microscope, and the latter have the greater value in the practical conduct of life. To find the truth, the short view is as necessary as the long. In a drama the characters are at least as important as the plot. Monism with its conception of the absolute and pluralism with its emphasis upon individuality are equally valuable and significant. In the clash of schools and opinions now one may be uppermost, now the

other; but neither is supreme lord of intelligence. The principle of the plurality of souls must rank with that of unity of origins. The highest unity is an ideal one, and consists not in singleness of substance or power, but in harmony of aim and endeavor. This, so far from being an eternal reality existing independently of men, is constituted by the loyalty and endeavor of individuals, apart from which it exists only as a possibility. This is at least the case with that phase of the world-unity with which we as moral beings are most concerned. A valid theology, working from the far end *and* the near, must make the pluralism of souls, the moral independence of the individual, as central and significant as the thought of God. Its scheme of thought will not be a circle drawn from one centre, but an ellipse with two foci. It will find the most important unity, not in the dominance of one will, but in the coöperation of many in a rich, varied life. Each man will be seen as a centre of activity capable of using the divine energy; God will be thought of as a Father, respecting the individuality of his children, seeking to win them to a nobler, higher life.